

To repel the attacks of Dutch skirmishers on the ice or in the swamps, Don Frederick had to train his men to manoeuvre on skates and march and fight up to their necks in water. These "men of butter," at whom Alva had sneered on his advent in the Netherlands, were proving far less malleable than the men of iron, whom, as he boasted, he had known how to tame. Worse still, Don Frederick's soldiers mutinied, and could not be trusted to face famine and submersion in these treacherous fens. Leyden, which was next invested, held stoutly out, and in the same month Admiral Bossu was worsted and taken prisoner by Dirkzoon's patriot 'fleet in the Zuyder See (October 1573). Alva was palpably baffled. "God and man are against me," exclaimed he bitterly as he faced the *impasse* which his tyranny and the heroism of the Dutch patriots had begotten. The long struggle had sapped his strength, and he was the object of the unutterable hatred which his atrocities and his arbitrary taxation had inspired throughout the desolated provinces. The Council of Blood was bad enough; it outraged every principle of just government. The arbitrary tax of a tenth penny, or ten per cent, on all sales meant material ruin as well. Business came to a standstill. But it meant ruin to Alva at the same time, for the stagnation of trade paralysed the nerves of government. His departure on the arrival of his successor, Requesens, in November 1573, was a flight rather than a withdrawal.

Requesens, grand commander of Castile and ex-governor of Milan, came to an impossible task. An empty exchequer, a ruined country, a mutinous army of sixty thousand men, the spirit of revolt spreading even into the Catholic provinces, did not hold out much prospect of improving on Alva's failure. He tried to throw the patriots off their guard by negotiation, but William knew too well that the change of tactics was but a blind. As long as a heretic remained in the Netherlands, there could be no lasting peace with the Spanish bigot. It was his fixed idea that Philip would never keep faith with him or his heretic adherents. He was willing to negotiate, if negotiations could bring about a durable settlement on the basis of adequate guarantees for the maintenance of the rights stipulated. But he had no faith in the diplomatic protestations of Philip's representatives, and he was determined to